

Beans - A New Twist on an Old Saying

It may not be as catchy as the popular children's rhyme, but beans (which are actually vegetables) may indeed be magical for your health. Rich in protein, calcium, phosphorus, folate and iron, popular dried beans include black beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, pink beans and pinto beans.

The 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend eating 3 cups of dried beans per week to reduce your risk of heart disease by up to 16 percent. Most Americans eat about a third of this amount. Recent research shows eating one-half cup of pinto beans daily can reduce serum cholesterol by 8 percent.

Full of complex carbohydrates yet fat-free, beans can play a role in weight management by making you feel full without a lot of calories. Beans are a great source of insoluble and soluble fiber, with 6 to 8 grams in a half-cup. They promote a healthy digestive tract, may reduce your risk of some types of cancer and can help control diabetes and maintain healthy blood glucose levels.